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Occupational exposure to EMFs: An ILO perspective

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The protection of the worker against sickness, disease and injury arising out of employment is one of the tasks assigned to the International Labour Organization (ILO) in the words of the Preamble of its Constitution. The protection of workers against risks from exposure to EMF falls naturally within the scope of the work of the ILO. The ILO uses, in a co-ordinated manner, various means of action to give governments and employers' and workers' organizations the necessary help in drawing up and implementing programmes for the improvement of working conditions and the safety and health of workers. These means include international standards in the form of conventions and recommendations, codes of practice, dissemination of information and technical cooperation. Hazards of non ionizing electromagnetic radiation and risks from occupational exposures to them have been an increased concern to the ILO in particular over the last three decades. The ILO has collaborated with the ICNIRP and the WHO in the development of a number of practical guides and reports which include: Occupational Hazards from Non-Ionizing Electromagnetic Radiation (ILO OSH Series No. 53), Protection of Workers From Power Frequency Electric and Magnetic Fields (ILO OSH Series No. 69), Visual Display Units: Radiation Protection Guidance (ILO OSH Series No. 70), and Safety in the Use of Radiofrequency Dielectric Heaters and Sealers (ILO OSH Series No. 71). These publications provide information with respect to the occupational hazards of exposure to EMFs. They include guidance on working conditions and procedures that will lead to higher standards of safety for all personnel engaged in the operation which gives rise to occupational exposure to EMFs. They were prepared in particular for the use of competent authorities, employers and workers, and in general all persons in charge of occupational safety and health.

The current activities of the ILO on EMFs include: development of a new practical guide on occupational exposure to EMFs in collaboration with WHO and NIOSH, studies on the identifications and recognition of diseases as occupational caused by EMF at work, inclusion of occupational diseases from EMFs into the ILO international list of occupational diseases and promote the applications of these international instrument in member States.